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SUBJECT: American Culture Week A Big Hit at Xiamen University
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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: ConGen Guangzhou hosted its first ever "American Culture Week" at Xiamen University's School of Humanities from November 9-13. Despite pressure from the University's Foreign Affairs Office to cancel the program, including the Consul General's opening speech highlighting the President's then impending visit, a professor at the university prevailed and allowed the Consulate access for five full days of public diplomacy programming. The program was so well-attended that two additional academic institutions, to which the Consulate had never been permitted access, invited PASoff to speak during the same week. ConGen Guangzhou will use the week's activities as a model for programming similar culture weeks at universities in Hainan and Guangdong provinces in the next six months. END SUMMARY.
Making a Splash at one of China's Top Universities

12. (U) Xiamen University (Xiada) is one of China's "211" universities- i.e. one of the government-designated 100 best universities in the 21st century- and is regarded as one of China's top 20 universities. The week kicked off with an opening ceremony and remarks delivered by the Consul General to about 100 students and faculty, highlighting the President's then imminent arrival as well as American culture. During the week PASoff lectured on "What is American Culture?"; hosted five discussions following the School of Humanities' screenings of Mona Lisa Smile, In the Wild, Forrest Gump, Gran Torino, and Dead Poets Society; participated in panel discussions on Henry David Thoreau and American Individualism, America's Cultural Personality: Optimism and Creativity, the American Financial System, and American Evolution: How Social Distinctiveness Influenced Traditional Values; and toured Xiada's main and Zhangzhou campus libraries to discuss American Corners, increasing cooperation and access to Public Affairs IRC resources, and possible programming of American culture events. Total attendance at the week's events was 920 people.
Welcome to Xiamen -- Sort Of

13. (SBU) While no activities were interrupted or cancelled, the school's Foreign Affairs Office (FAO), heavily scrutinized all events. Bowing to pressure, the Dean of the Humanities School dropped out of the opening ceremony at the last minute. The Chinese-American professor who was the driving force behind getting the Consulate access reported that he faced strong pressure to disinvite the Consul General from the opening ceremony (but refused to do so). Two FAO representatives attended the first day of programs and the professor who helped PAS organize the programming reported that the FAO was requiring him to produce a report on all Consulate activities in Xiamen (which he also flatly refused to do).

Collateral Rewards

14. (U) Guangzhou had never been granted access to the Xiamen University of Technology or Yuntai High School, but teachers from both schools attended PASOff's first lecture and then promptly invited her to speak at their respective schools. Four days later, PASOff spoke at Yuntai High School to 40 high school students about American culture and U.S. higher education and then traveled to Xiamen University of Technology and spoke to more than 200 students in the Foreign Languages School. Both visits ended with applause and invitations to return to do further programming.
Will There Be a Next Time?

15. (SBU) COMMENT: While American Culture Week was popular with Chinese students and professors, it is still too early to tell whether it will reduce Fujian FAO suspicions of public diplomacy initiatives and lead to increased access to universities in Fujian.
END COMMENT.
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